

Spheres of the Nafs



Three principal stages

There are three principal stages of nafs in Sufi Wisdom, also mentioned in different verses of the Quran. These mirror, in essence, the Hermetic spheres of initiate, external adept, and internal adept. The Sufis call them stages in the process of such development, refinement and mastery of the nafs.

The inciting nafs (an-nafs al-'ammārah)

In its primitive stage the nafs incites us to such a weltanschauung of [conventional] evil, of hedonism, the action of impulse: this is the nafs as the lower self, the base instincts. In the eponymous Sura of the Quran, Yusuf (AS) says "Yet I claim not that my nafs was innocent: Verily the nafs incites to evil." [1] This stage is generally divided into the levels al nafs al-hayawaniyya and al nafs al-iblisiyya. Al nafs al-hayawaniyya ("the animal state") describes the self, which runs after material possessions, sensual desires and animalistic pleasures. Al nafs al-iblisiyya is even lower than the animal state, because the self seeks love for itself, hedonism. The Quran enjoins the faithful "to hinder the nafs from hawa (worldly desires of the senses and desire for worldly abstractions", [2]

The self-accusing nafs (an-nafs al-luwwāmah)

In Sura al-Qiyama the Quran mentions "the self-accusing nafs". [3] This is the stage where "the conscience is awakened and the self accuses one for listening to one's ego. One repents and asks for forgiveness." Here the nafs is inspired by the numinous, sees the results of your actions, agrees with your self-vision, sees your weaknesses, and aspires to perfection.

The nafs at peace (an-nafs al-muṭma'innah)

In **Sura al-Fajr** the Quran mentions "the nafs at peace". [4] This is the ideal stage of ego for Muslims. On this level one is firm in one's faith and leaves bad manners behind. The soul becomes tranquil, at peace. At this stage, followers of Sufism have relieved

themselves of all materialism and worldly problems and are satisfied with the will of God.

Four additional stages of nafs

In addition to the three principal stages, another four are sometimes cited:

The inspired nafs (an-nafs al-mulhamah)

This stage comes between the 2nd and 3rd principal stages. It is the stage of action and deeds. On this level one becomes more firm in listening to one's conscience, but is not yet surrendered to wyrd. Once you have seen your weaknesses and have set your targets, this ego inspires you to do good deeds and to be on the plus side. The followers of Taugu say that it is important that whenever you think of good, you must immediately act upon it. Abbas Bin Abdul Muttalib lays down three rules:

1. **Ta'Jeel or Swiftness.** A good deed must be done immediately and there should be no laziness.
2. **Tehqeer or Contempt.** You must look at your good acts with contempt otherwise you will become self-righteous.
3. **Ikhfa or Secrecy.** You must keep your good acts secret otherwise people will praise you and it will make you self-righteous.

According to the Quran, charity should be given both secretly and openly. In Muhammad Asad's translation of the Quran, 14:31 reads:

“[And] tell [those of] My servants who have attained to faith that they should be constant in prayer and spend [in Our way], secretly and openly, out of what We provide for them as sustenance, were there come a Day when there will be no bargaining, and no mutual befriending.”

The pleased nafs (an-nafs ar-raḍīyyah)

The stage comes after the 3rd principal stage. On this level one is pleased with whatever comes from Allah and doesn't live in the past or future, but in the moment.

The pleasing nafs (an-nafs al-marḍīyyah)

On this level the two Ruhs (δαίμων) in man “have made peace”. “One is soft and tolerant with people and has good Akhlaq (أخلاق), good manners.”

The pure nafs (an-nafs aṣ-ṣāfiyyah)

On this level one is dressed in the attributes of the *Insan Kamil*, the sage, the immortal, who is completely surrendered and inspired by Allah. One is in full agreement with the Will of Allah (wyrd).

Full sequence of nafs development

Therefore, the full sequence of the seven stages of the development of the nafs is as follows:

1. The inciting nafs (an-nafs al-'ammārah)
2. The self-accusing nafs (an-nafs al-luwwāmah)
3. The inspired nafs (an-nafs al-mulhamah)
4. The nafs at peace (an-nafs al-muṭma'innah)
5. The pleased nafs (an-nafs ar-raḍīyyah)
6. The pleasing nafs (an-nafs al-marḍīyyah)
7. The pure nafs (an-nafs aṣ-ṣāfiyyah)

Characteristics of nafs

In its primitive state the **nafs** has seven characteristics that must be overcome:

1. Pride (Takabbur)
2. Greed (Hirs)
3. Jealousy (Hasad)
4. Lust (Shahwah)
5. Backbiting (Gheebah)
6. Stinginess (Bokhl)
7. Malice (Keena)

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References

- [1] Quran 12:53
- [2] Quran 79:40
- [3] Quran 75:2
- [4] Quran 89:27